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THE STATUE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN BY GUTZON BORGLUM IN NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

A Famous Sculptor of Lincoln Sees the Lincoln Play

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The Abraham Lincoln We Love

Between the acts of an English poet's dramatization of Abraham Lincoln a sculptor famous for his statues of the Great Emancipator tells the dramatic critic what Lincoln means to him

By Montrose J. Moses

THERE was method in my asking Mr. Gutzon Borglum to go with me to see John Drinkwater's play, "Abraham Lincoln." We had both seen it once before; we were both eager to see it again. But in addition I had a feeling that from a sculptor, who had done a deal of study of Lincoln, I would get some interesting reactions which would enrich my first impressions of the play. I was not disappointed. From the moment we were comfortably seated in our chairs, I saw the sculptor chipping away at his impressions, as I imagine he chipped his head of Lincoln from the block of marble; in words he sketched his image of Lincoln for me, as I imagine he sketched his first design for the noble figure of Lincoln seated on a bench, waiting for the people to come and sit by him.

I REMEMBER once hearing a minister deliver a sermon on Abraham Lincoln to the children of his congregation; the first two rows of pews were lined with bobbing heads and restless bodies. Before the pulpit was placed one of the not too prepossessing likenesses of the martyred President. "You all think this is a picture of a very ugly man," suggested the minister. There was a roar of affirmation. "Well, now—look at his eyes—have they not compassion in them? See his mouth—is there not gentleness in the sensitive lines? Watch the eyes closely—are not kindness and humor there?" Thus, carefully, he sketched the essential humanity of Lincoln for these children, and then he put the question again, "Do you now think this is a picture of an ugly man?" And the answer again was, "Yes."

This story has a double moral—it points to the fact that our school children are wofully in need of having their imaginations cultivated, and it shows—which is to our purpose here—that the true inspiration of history lies, not in fact, but in character at supreme moments. The English poet, John Drinkwater, having all his life held Lincoln to his heart as a hero, has written a play which, in substance, is nothing more than a series of events contained in every school history, and yet which, in its effect, makes us see Lincoln as the minister would have had his children see him. This has been done by the simple adherence to simple speech, and with no effort to put more drama into the play than the events themselves actually held. Having seen Drinkwater's drama, "Abraham Lincoln," you have a living statue of Lincoln in your mind forever—a man of des-



A moment that reveals the essential nobility of Lincoln's character—when he pardons one of Grant's sentries, a mere boy, who is to be shot as he has been found asleep at his post

tiny amidst moving events—a man whose face showed, in every expression, the shaping of a soul which was helping to shape a nation. Drinkwater has modeled his conception of Lincoln in his play as a sculptor would cut it out of stone—conscious of how Lincoln felt at every hour he was called to act. What makes every scene in Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" so effective is that *we* are made to feel that the playwright knows exactly what was stirring in Lincoln's mind when the committee calls on him to accept the nomination for the presidency; when, in his first cabinet meeting, he sees what opposition he has to face; when, at the supreme height of determination, he announces his Emancipation Proclamation; and when, as a visitor to Grant, on the field of battle, he pardons the sentry, a mere boy, found asleep at his post.

These commonplaces of school history are beacons in the character of Lincoln. By word and phrase, Drinkwater colors them with the spirit of a great man, and he gives us a Lincoln, which, in London and New York, has been unhesitatingly acclaimed and accepted. It is not always that we say, "This is our Lincoln." The camps are divided, for instance, in liking for the St. Gaudens statue of Lincoln, and for the ungainly figure of the Great American by Barnard, recently unveiled at Manchester, England. Others, to settle the question, brush the two aside, and declare that the only real Lincoln is the head by Gutzon Borglum, in the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington. We have nothing to do with the dispute here. I mention it because, in the stage production, as being given in New York at present, and likely to travel thru the country for many years, the actor who portrays Lincoln often stands as though he had studied the Barnard statue for every wrinkle of his coat; and in expression looks as tho he had selected material, now from the Lincoln life mask and then from Borglum's head. It was this constantly recurring similarity between Drinkwater's methods of sketching Lincoln and the sculptor's method of cutting his way to character that first suggested my asking Mr. Borglum to go with me to see "Abraham Lincoln." The evening was a revealing one, for I was with a man who doubtless knows more of the human make-up of the American leader than any other student of history. For fifteen years he fitted himself for his task before he put chisel to marble; for fifteen years he ferreted out every source of Lincoln's life, examining the wealth of photographs,

and explaining every expression by some shaping event. "To my mind," he said, "that is the only way to reach character thru photography—to reason out why the subject had the particular expression at the particular time."

We sat thru the play enthralled; each had seen it before. Borglum gave himself completely over to the living progress of events. I never saw a man more responsive to character, reveling in the phases of loyalty and disloyalty among the members of Lincoln's cabinet, which only served to sharpen the eyes of Lincoln, and to reveal how completely he knew the men conniving against him. "Lincoln had the keenness of a horse trader," Mr. Borglum said under his breath, as the Great Leader, in one of the scenes, faced Seward with his double dealing, and made him own up. "They couldn't put anything over on him." Then he sat up with the enthusiasm of a boy, as Lincoln, entering the fateful cabinet meeting when he presents the Emancipation Proclamation, sat him down and read to his impatient political family the latest thing by Artemus Ward. "There's the supreme moment. Lincoln is applying the acid test. It's a joy."

All thru the play he would grab my arm whenever the actor impersonating Lincoln approached nearest his conception. These moments were mostly when the head was down. But on the whole, the actor stood the sculptor's gaze admirably. To judge by Borglum's enthusiasm, I should say it was eighty per cent to the good. "Lincoln was not vain," the sculptor declared, "but he knew which side of his face was the best for pictures, and he seemed to know exactly at what angle to hold his head. This man on the stage appears to have studied very carefully the outward details, but where he is most successful is in the throwing of spiritual action on the face. I don't believe Lincoln ever wore such a short coat, nor do I believe that it is right to over-interpret the ungainliness of the man. Lincoln was not awkward; he was large and loosely hung together. He always sat in chairs too small for him, for he was an exceptionally tall man. He was careless of attire, but that is a different matter. Without putting Mr. Borglum in the position to criticize, I could glean what he considered to be the defects of the Barnard statue from his criticism of the actor on the stage. But he did not spare himself; he told me exactly how his own ideas changed while he worked on his marble head.

Here was a man, steeped in Lincoln lore, witnessing a very

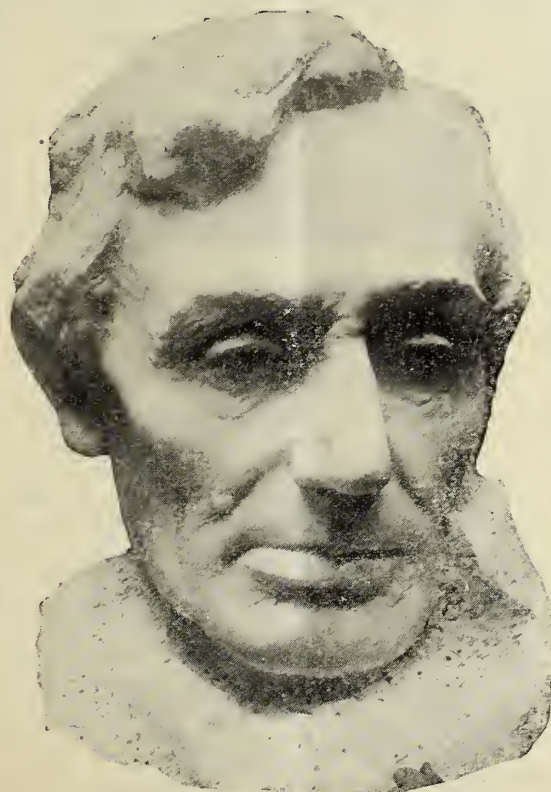
simple play, yet boyishly touched in his interest over Lincoln's humanity; applauding the minor actors wherever it seemed they had made a study of their parts directly from history. "Watch Grant," he exclaimed, "It was just in that way he used to throw his cigar into his face, and wipe the ash end of it on the lapel of his coat." That the theater had a thoro grip of Borglum there was no gainsaying. In the play, when Lincoln, with Hay, visits Grant in camp, he stays the night, eager to learn if General Meade will bring news of Lee's willingness to surrender. Propped up in a chair, the Great Leader falls asleep. Grant passes, gets his army coat and tenderly covers the President with it. Before going out he pauses and looks into Lincoln's face. Borglum turned to me. "I know nothing greater," he said, "than to see two great men together."

I am not telling these actions and reactions in the spirit of spying on Mr. Borglum's emotion; but rather in justification of my claim that Drinkwater has somehow done the trick—he has given us a living statue of Lincoln, in a day when we need statues of living men! Of course, being a sculptor who has to deal with the physical proportions, there are things not necessary in a play that are necessary for the sculptor's art. I learned from Mr. Borglum the size of Lincoln's collar, the way his hair was brushed, and when he changed the parting of it, the character of his beard—points that Mr. Drinkwater did not have to concern himself with. But tho the sculptor must consider these details he must not be enslaved by them. He must be chiefly concerned with the spirit.

I was curious to find out exactly how certain liberties taken by Drinkwater with historical circumstances would affect Borglum. For instance, there is a new character introduced into the Lincoln cabinet. Drinkwater justifies his use by explaining that upon him are placed the opposing forces with which Lincoln had to contend; thus was Drinkwater relieved of clogging his other characters with elements that had nothing to do with their main value. I could see, by Borglum's approval of taking any liberties that did no harm to the essential truth of history, that he was being true to type as an artist himself: art is not the exact photograph of life, but the arrangement of those facts in life which will best depict it in its magnitude. If Drinkwater had set himself the task of writing an American play with Lincoln as the chief character, he might have fallen into gross errors of local col- [Continued on page 187



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"Did you know that Paderewski, Abraham Lincoln and John Keats have similarly shaped heads?" Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor, thinks so. And he ought to know for he did the head of Lincoln shown above, which is in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington

The Abraham Lincoln We Love

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or; as it is, he has, now and again, in the printed play, phrased his talk as only an Englishman would speak. But that is easily changed for the stage. Drinkwater has lifted Lincoln out of his locale, and has dealt with him as any poet might deal with Dante. An artist has to lay the foundation of historical study in tracing character. After that the fuse-pipe of his genius is what counts. There is much in common between the Borglum and Drinkwater methods.

After the play, we sat long into the night talking about Lincoln. That is to the credit of the Drinkwater play; it has set many people thinking and talking of Lincoln. I heard new stories of Lincoln's mother whom he helped bury on a hillside where he might see the spot every day; of his early love, from which, Borglum says, marking a line in his face, he never quite recovered. But perhaps the most interesting comment of the evening came apropos of nothing except that we were talking of the proportions of Lincoln's head. "Did you know," he volunteered, "that John Keats, Abraham Lincoln, and Paderewski have similarly shaped heads?" Which is thought-stirring, even though it is another story!

Drinkwater tells us that as a student in England, at the Birmingham University, he first came to know and love Lincoln, taking him as his ideal. It is appropriate that Lincoln should serve the young manhood of the Anglo-Saxon race. When the time came to write the play, the poet found it all but on paper. He used the chronicle play form, each scene preceded by a poetic interlude delivered by a herald, dressed as a man of the hour, and descriptive of the spiritual stuff from which the scene is evolved; also narrating the intermediate events, with which the play has nothing to do, but which helped to shape the weary soul of the Great Leader. From the descriptions I have read of the English production, I fear the actor playing Lincoln has made him theatrical; certainly the Irish brogue of his speech must serve to destroy the illusion. But it is my impression, from the evening spent with Gutzon Borglum at "Abraham Lincoln" as given in New York, that the excellence of the American production lies in its maintenance of untheatrical simplicity. One sits down before it, not caring if the soldiers click their heels together quite in the regulation fashion, not worried as to whether Lincoln drank tea in the White House at 4 o'clock, English fashion—but touched, deeply touched, over the burden, almost too great a burden for one man's shoulders to bear. There is not one moment that you are allowed to forget Lincoln's stupendous coping with events. And that is the spirit one has while looking at the head done by Gutzon Borglum. Here are two examples, therefore, of art making history live—the one in a play—the other in marble which speaks volumes, tho it is silent.

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